THE TOWER

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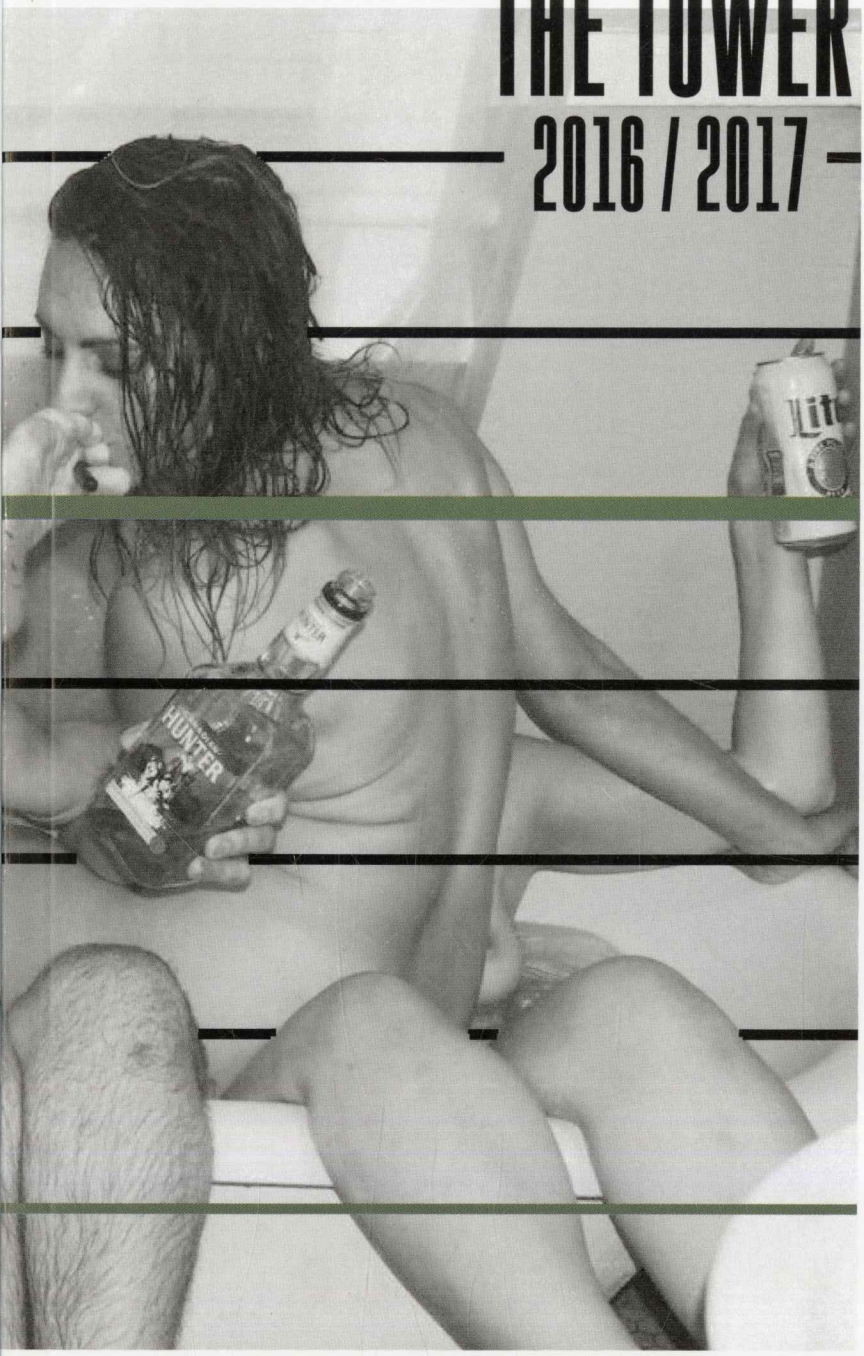

THE TOWER

UNIVERSITY OF MONTEVALLO
2016/2017

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

You came.
You saw.
You conquered.

Bravo Montevallo creators.

Leslie Smith

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LONG WALKS ON THE BEACH

ABIGAIL BETTS

She checked to see if her keys were in her purse for the fourth time. On her way out of the house she peeked at the lock on one of the windows for good measure. The house was filled with so much pristine whiteness, it would surely be an ideal target for robbers. This was the first time that she'd rented a house by herself, and she felt more paranoid than a bride getting a spray tan on her wedding day. But the sun was out, the forecast was clear, and she had been killing herself at the gym for months so that she could wear this bathing suit.

She finally shut the door and locked it behind her, testing the deadbolt one more time. She had neatly stacked her beach supplies on the porch, but as she looked at it she had no idea how she was going to get it all down to the beach. The cooler looked the most daunting; filled with ice, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and an unreasonable amount of beer. She'd thought about just tossing in a six pack, but she had a vision of meeting dozens of eligible strangers on the beach, and she'd be damned if she didn't have enough drinks to go around. The umbrella and the chair both had straps that didn't look too difficult to manage. But her bag was loaded to the brim with bottles of sunscreen, bestselling novels, and back issues of People magazine.

Bubbling with independent confidence and stubborn determination, she loaded the beach chair and umbrella onto her body. The polyester straps dug into her bare skin a little, but they weren't terribly

heavy, so she chose to ignore it. Getting the cooler down the porch steps was much more difficult, and much less graceful. There was a dangerous moment that almost sent the entire contents spilling onto the sidewalk, but she recovered and persevered.

When her mother had recommended this place, she had been skeptical about the idea of taking a week-long trip solo. Little did she know the boundlessness of her daughters' preference for isolation. The worst part of going to the beach is getting peer-pressured into taking a walk down the beach. She felt strongly that walks on the beach are entirely overrated. Trying to balance on the slope of slippery sand between the water and the shoreline is a recipe for a twisted ankle or an undignified tumble into the surf.

Walking to the pier, she realized, too late, that it would have been a good idea to put some shorts on over her bathing suit bottoms for the walk down to the beach. The house was fairly close to the beach access, but walking with bare legs for any distance in this heat was pretty unbearable. Once she made it to the wooden pier, she took a break, resting her bag on top of the cooler. She dug around in the chaos of her bag, looking for the elegant, wide-brimmed hat she'd bought before leaving town. She realized she'd forgotten it at the house, and found her ancient, reliable baseball cap at the bottom of the bag instead. Reluctantly, she made her way down the pier wearing her new red bikini and a tattered college baseball cap.

When she reached the end of the pier, she faced the stairs with trepidation, but pushed onward. Halfway down, she realized that pulling the cooler down the stairs while walking backwards wasn't the

best idea. As it was, she missed the last step of the stairs, and felt the cruel grasp of gravity tug her down. While the cooler safely plopped onto the ground, she fell backwards into the sand. Her back hit hard against the lumpy bundles of her chair and the umbrella. She'd have liked to just lie there, trying to catch the breath that had been knocked from her chest, but the sand pooling around her bare body was roughly the temperature of freshly boiled pasta.

She scrambled to her feet, thrown off balance by the awkward angle of the equipment strapped across her shoulders. Unfortunately, the sand now added an additional element of resistance, and her efforts to pull the cooler made her feel like a heavily burdened Budweiser horse. However, the sand was so hot under her bare feet, that she was motivated to move exceptionally quickly. It was a helpful inconvenience. But then she was distracted by the stinging pain spreading across her face. She started to sweat profusely, sandwiched between the sun's rays and the sand's fire. Consequentially, her pores were opening to the heat and drinking the high-SPF sunscreen she'd carefully applied.

She allowed herself to let loose a string of profanity under her breath for the remainder of her walk, and trudged on until she finally reached the shoreline. To her left, there was a chaotic family with no fewer than four children. To the right, there was a couple that looked well away into the drinks in their cooler, both of them smoking like chimneys. She wanted to keep walking down the beach to find a better spot, but sweat was dripping into her eyes, her thighs felt like sandpaper rubbing against each other, and it felt like the soles of her feet were blistered by the heat.

She set up camp between the two groups, politely smiling and waving at the couple's slurred greetings. Shrugging out of the weight of everything piled on her shoulders and arms, she shook the umbrella out of its nylon sleeve first. Then she hesitated, trying to remember how her father used to get their umbrella into the sand. She had always been in charge of piling sand around the base of the pole once her father had gotten it into the ground. But now she couldn't remember exactly how that happened.

Feeling self-conscious in front of her neighbors, she pulled out her phone and quickly looked up an instructional video online while she made a show of popping her chair into place. She felt a little concerned about the amount of effort depicted in the video, but she was ready for another challenge of vacation independence. She plunged the pole of the umbrella into the sand as hard as she could, disappointed at the meager inch that had disappeared into the sand. Pressing on, she drove the stake into the ground with awkward, circular motions that made her feel like the least charming pole dancer in a strip club.

She contented herself with the depth she'd managed, and popped out the umbrella's canopy. Then she dug around in her bag, pulled out an old t-shirt, and wiped the sweat from her body before reapplying a pound of oily sunscreen. The stinging sensation was becoming less noticeable, and she finally collapsed into the scratchy nylon comfort of her beach chair. Her instinct was to grab a cold beer from the cooler to reward her efforts, but the prospect of drinking beer in this heat made her too nauseous. Instead, she pulled out a shrink-wrapped

peanut butter and jelly sandwich, relishing in the icy coolness of the bread. She began to settle in and thoroughly relax, laying her massive, fluffy beach towel across the offensive texture of her chair.

She dug the most promising novel recommended by the bestsellers' shelf at Books-a-Million out of her bag. A few pages in, she found that her mind was wandering away from its forgettable, middle-aged protagonist, and tossed it onto the sand. She pulled out her headphones instead, and played a pre-selected playlist she'd made for the week. She shut her eyes and tried to lie back in her chair and simply focus on the vitamin D soaking into every square inch of her skin.

But she couldn't ignore the paranoid thought of someone rifling through her bag, or taking unwanted pictures while she was sleeping. She wasn't fond of walking on the beach, or of sleeping on the beach. She started to feel boredom creeping in on her, so she gave in and pulled a beer out of the cooler, settling in with a magazine. She flipped through the pages mindlessly and nursed her drink, feeling herself finally start to relax. She was reaching a euphoric level of relaxation and intoxication when a herd of young men strutted by the water. They stumbled along in the shallow breakers, beer cans in hand. She tried to hide behind her magazine, and failed to ignore the sound of the men hollering at her.

She reminded herself that she should want them to come over, she should want some company by now, but she just prayed they'd keep walking. She felt vulnerable and exposed, wishing for a moment that she wasn't alone. When she went to the beach with her friends last summer, they'd flip off every pack of idiots that hooted and whistled at them. There was

a strength in numbers that she didn't have anymore. There was a persistent female voice in the back of her mind that reminded her that if she was alone, she was in danger. It was a primal kind of impulse that had been her constant companion ever since she watched The Silence of the Lambs when she was thirteen years old. The idea of being made into a skin suit is something that inevitably sticks with you.

She spent the rest of the afternoon using magazines as a flimsy, paper shield between herself and any passing men. The pages got progressively more flimsy every hour, the hot, humid sea air seeping into the paper until George Clooney's face started to look like it was melting.

Late into the afternoon, thunder growled in the distance under darkening skies. She checked the forecast on her phone again, and it still boasted clear skies, so she tossed it back in her bag and opened another beer. Condensation from the melted ice in the cooler dripped off the bottle and onto the sand. She mashed the wet sand between her fingers, idly rolling it into a little ball, and poured beer on it when it started to dry out. She had resorted to making friends with a ball of sticky beer mud.

A vein of lightning struck across the water, and another crash of thunder followed quickly after. She gathered the discarded books, magazines, and clothing from the sand around the chair and stuffed them into her bag. The wind started to pick up supernaturally fast. The sharp, unpredictable gusts shot painful bursts of sand against her bare legs as she tried to pack everything. The other families and couples around her were already hustling off the beach and back to their rows of colorful rental houses. A thick, gray cloak of clouds had rolled

across the sky, but there was a strange brightness that remained in the air that cast everything in a stark white paleness.

She had managed to fold the chair with the towel still on it when another gust sprayed sand into her face. It was like the weather had abandoned all sense and predictability within five minutes. The wind seemed to be personally attacking her from all fronts, blowing in all directions. She must have blocked out the chaos of summer weather from her mind, the way you conveniently forget the effects of tequila when you see a colorful, refreshing margarita across the bar.

Just as the sky started to turn black, she felt a sharp stab of windblown sand against her bare back, followed by a more tangible strike of metal against the back of her head. She fell face-first into the sand, stunned and terrified. When she raised her head, she saw the colorful swirl of her umbrella spinning off into the sand dunes. She groaned when she managed to struggle to her feet, gently probing the back of her head. The skin was painful and broken, and when she looked at her hand, there was a combination of sand and blood that looked like a grainy, gothic kind of Playdough.

She stumbled forward, struggling to run on the sand. It was like being in a nightmare chased by someone, with the earth grabbing at your ankles with every step. She finally caught sight of her umbrella, stuck on a wooden fence on top of a dune. She might have just let it go, but the wind was pushing the umbrella closer and closer to a row of luxurious houses on the beach, and she hated to think what replacing a window in a beach-side property would cost.

Beach dunes always held a kind of romantic appeal for her. It was probably because of the ever-present "keep off" signs that decorated the dunes in her childhood. She'd always wanted to know what playing on the alien, white hills with their odd, patchy vegetation would be like. The reality was a disappointing hell scape. The whimsical little bushes of vegetation on top of the dunes were actually evil little patches of dryness that felt like tiny claws scratching at her bare feet. Her foot got caught in a particularly thick patch of thorny vegetation and she tripped, rolling down the deceptively gentle slope of the dune. The plants and sand raked across her bare chest and back, adding injury to the undignified insults of the day.

In that moment, she felt like her mother should have put some money on the success of this vacation. She wouldn't have gotten great odds, but she would have definitely gotten a payoff by now. Being alone in this chaos was terrible. She felt like an idiot, running across the beach in an unsupportive bikini top, chasing after an umbrella with a polka dotted rainbow. And even if she managed to avoid getting struck by lightning, or getting impaled by another rogue umbrella, she definitely didn't want to drag all of her things back to the house. She had fought it as long as she could, but being alone on the beach was the worst. A landshark would've been welcome company.

The unpleasantness of the day finally reached its full potential as the umbrella flew over the fence and toward a gorgeous three-story house with massive, modern windows on every wall. In a moment of panic and insanity, she climbed over the house's low metal fence, trying to save its windows from the

wrath of her umbrella.

The umbrella landed in a pool, and she reached toward the pole from the water's edge, finally managing to grab hold just as the wind caught at the umbrella's canopy sticking out of the water. The umbrella caught the wind like a sail, and pulled her into the harsh, cold water. She spluttered under the heady sensation of chlorine, and struggled to shut the umbrella while still in the water. She wrapped her legs around the pole like a deranged koala, trying to keep the wind from pulling it away using her body weight and sheer, manic force of will.

She finally got the umbrella shut, and made her way out of the pool, keeping her arms wrapped around it, just in case the wind got any fresh ideas. At that point, she wasn't even surprised to see a man staring at her from the back door. And it made sense that he was absolutely gorgeous. She was bleeding and covered in sand. The fates demand that men you meet in that kind of state be absolutely gorgeous.

"You got it?" He called over the howl of the wind.

"Yes, yes, I'm so sorry I was in your pool-" Her voice was hoarse and cracked after spending the whole day without speaking to anyone.

"It's fine, are you-"

"I didn't want my umbrella to break your windows." Thunder struck again, uncomfortably close. "I should get away from the water... and I should definitely get off your property. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

She awkwardly walked by him, clinging to her umbrella in the hopes that it would hide some of her disheveled body. "Do you need a hand?" He called, holding onto his door. "You can come in and wait out

the storm if you want."

She warily looked at this stranger and the intimidating fortress that was his home. It was painted a cold gray color, and with its unreasonable number of windows, it looked like the apartment in American Psycho. "No, I couldn't, the rest of my things are-"

"Let me give you a hand!" He shut the door and followed her, flashing a worrisome white smile. "Can I take your umbrella for you?"

She hesitated a moment, trying to decide which was the least self-destructive path ahead of her. "Have you seen The Silence of the Lambs?"

THICKER THAN WATER

ABIGAIL BETTS

The lighthouse's beacon shines in a dependable and consistent circle. It never fails to go round and round, but it never quite hits me. A safe distance behind me, the house is glowing with light and laughter. Most of that noise is just my family's perverse, alcohol-fueled version of Survivor. Some cast members get voted off the island now and then in a mess of divorce proceedings. And it's usually the old men in Hawaiian print shirts. However, the leggy blondes always manage to stick around.

The lighthouse was built down among the rocks on the shore. It always seemed like a strange placement to me. The beacon hits right at the windows of the second story of the house. Who could sleep through that? I suppose it might make things in the bedroom more interesting up there. A consistent strobe light continually smacking you in the face in the middle of mundane coastal passion. Sexy.

I hesitate to leave the pier because it's like a sort of suspended wooden purgatory that is relatively peaceful. And it is anyone's guess which way leads where- up, or down, down, down. At the end of the night, I would work out that heaven-hell dichotomy for myself, but I believe in the sanctity of preserving unadulterated, individual opinion in the present. "One man's hell", and all...

But, to make the case for hell, (just for the hell of it) inside that house, there were nine distinct circles that never stopped spinning, ad nauseum.

The first circle was my oldest uncle, smoking on the porch steps. He'd sit there, in his tweed jacket, and repeat his same anti-establishment, anti-theistic bullshit like a pessimistic mantra. Then he'd take another drag and return to staring out at the ocean with disgust.

The second circle holds my youngest uncle and whatever leggy blonde he has with him that particular

holiday season. This circle usually involves uncomfortable, public ass-groping that does not even aim at subtlety.

The kitchen epitomizes the gluttony reserved for the third circle of this holiday household, and this circle may be the most despicable because not one of the dozens of dishes ever looks remotely appetizing.

Then, the basement is greed personified. It housed the infamous dart debacle of 1990 that resulted in a restraining order between all four of my uncles. Suffice it to say that there was a significant amount of gambling involved during after-dinner games that Christmas. But it didn't reach its peak until the drunken attempts at "rigging" a dart-throwing competition. Those hospital bills are still a taboo subject in any circle.

My grandfather's personal atmosphere of irrational anger is the cosmic composition of the fifth circle, and it tends to float around the house, leaking death and destruction wherever it likes. One year, this circle gravitated toward the squirrels that managed to thwart my grandfather's every effort to keep them away from the bird feeders. On that Christmas morning, we walked downstairs to see him firing at them with a .22 rifle through the window of the breakfast nook. He shot the tabby cat instead. As a result, my grandmother fell into his gravitational field of anger as well that year.

My cousin Faye leads a lonely existence in our sixth circle. She openly defies the core tenet that keeps our family together: food, above all. While the rest of us choke down the many bizarre dishes of eastern Europe with good-natured nausea, Faye is, of all things, a vegetarian.

Our seventh circle tends to focus its destructive power in the living room. Multiple fist-fights have broken out over which game to put on the television, who gets to sit in the La-Z-Boy, or who has to sleep on the pull-out couch.

My aunt's steadfast refusal to admit her multiple cosmetic operations makes the eighth circle slightly more amusing than the others. And this circle houses two very

fraudulently massive circles within itself. And within these circles is enough silicon to fashion a very comfortable memory foam pillow.

Finally, the ninth circle is the omnipresent familial guilt that tricks all of us into returning to the scene of multiple crimes every holiday season. Because, no matter how far away someone gets, no matter how happy they manage to be, gravity always draws you back into family.

***

I drop my bags at the front door and take stock of the decorations in the foyer before I dare cross the threshold of the kitchen. Grandma's Pomeranian makes a surprisingly sufficient replacement for Cerberus, and I'm wearing insufficiently thick boots. My ankles and my soul are dangerously exposed.

The foyer drips red from every surface. In any and every corner, giant poinsettias make the room feel like a horrific shot of bloody tropics filmed through a red filter in a Vietnam War epic. Sparkling red plastic icicles drip from the banister. One tree is covered in a swarm of cardinals with dead, beady eyes that follow me around the room. Another tree bleeds heavy red tinsel that bows the branches, and the third tree is coated in various personifications of Santa Claus in his Tarantino-red ensemble. It already feels too Kubrick and dizzying in here.

The first sign of intelligent life makes me relax a little when Alex comes down the stairs. "Been hiding out in the attic?" I ask.

"Just getting it ready for you, actually," he says with a subdued grin.

"Oh..." my stomach twists with guilt. "Right, I'm sorry, the lighthouse is freezing this time of year..." I hate myself for pointing out the obvious misery he gets to sleep through thanks to my presence. Welcome home.

"It's fine, really, I crash in there a lot, anyway. I'm

fully acclimated." He reaches around me for my bags, despite my uncomfortable protestations, and heads back up the bloody staircase. "It's good to see you. I'll be right down for dinner."

Alex disappears upstairs, and I happily take refuge in the hellish third circle of the kitchen. A dozen competing smells of community and cooking assault my senses as I pass from person to person, being hugged by clouds of booze, perfume, and cologne. I force a smile through the routine questions about school. Their hostility is just barely veiled in every comment.

My grandfather asks if my head's gotten bigger since the last time he's seen me, and proceeds to ruffle my hair like I'm ten years old. My grandmother pulls him away with a routine chastisement, and tells me that I need to eat more. I smile and turn to the food spread on the counter, tucking a pierogi into a napkin where I'm sure she can see me. When she goes to pester my uncle-philosopher about Faye's whereabouts, I tuck the napkin in my handbag. I never quite feel comfortable enough to leave my handbag in my room. It helps to have something to hold.

One of the uncles puts a drink in my hand, and pushes me toward the dinner table, pulling out my chair with an intoxicated scrape across the tile floor. The table is full of contradicting, ethnic dishes, though the fumes from everyone's glass is already enough to make me nauseous.

"When do you go back to school, Ellie?" Grandpa asks from the head of the table, with half of a mangled roll in his mouth.

"Actually..." I sigh, but let it go. I hate that name, but on the battleground of the dinner table, the best tactician picks their battles carefully. "I've got to get back at the end of the week."

"Short break." Grandpa grunts, tearing at more bread teeth-first.

"We're just glad to have you, for anytime at all." My grandma says this with the most tiredly sweet smile, while she drains her glass of dark beer and tears into her

plate of salmon. This family is not one for pairing alcohols with any particular dish, when it comes to drink, everyone is of a "love the one you're with" mentality.

"Fucking short." Faye's father says.

"Who's short?" Leggy Blonde Number Four asks.

"Ellie's break from school." Alex says quietly, carefully decorating his potatoes with peas.

"Oh," Leggy Blonde Number Four sighs. "But there's something to be said for short men..."

"Who's talking about short men?" Grandpa growls over the rim of his glass. "Our men aren't short."

"I'm short," Jamie says cheerfully. Age nine seems like an excellent defense at the moment, and I envy him.

"You're not done growing yet, sweetie." Grandma squeezes his skinny arm.

"Why have you got to jet right back to school?" Faye's father asks.

"I..."

Alex asks, "Where's Faye?"

"Is she bringing someone?" Grandma asks.

"Dusty books and pretentious old snots aren't going anywhere." One of the uncles says with a shrug. "Stay a week longer, Ellie, and we can sign you up for the horseshoes tournament!"

"Some of those dusty old professors can go everywhere." Another of the uncle slurs this with a drunken performance of his knife repeatedly stabbing through his dinner roll.

"We're at the dinner table." Grandma complains in a sing-song tone, moving to go get another beer. Alex goes down to the basement instead.

Faye's father sighs and nurses his red wine before speaking. "Faye will be by after dinner."

"I want to go to sleep after dinner." Grandpa grumbles, stabbing a pierogi on Grandma's plate with his fork.

"Me, too," Jamie says.

"Are you seeing anyone, Ellie?" Leggy Blonde

Number Four asks me.

"Well, I..."

"She didn't bring anyone." Grandma says. "But you could have, Ellie, any friend of yours is always welcome."

"Don't make promises we don't want to keep." Grandpa barks.

"Well... there's still time, Ellie. I wouldn't worry about it. Someone will snatch you up, I'm sure," Leggy Blonde Number Four continues.

"But I..."

"Plus, it's quite popular for young women to be educated right now." She smiles an ultraviolet horror at me.

"That hot little British chippie went to school!" One of my younger uncles nudges me in the side with a bawdy grin. "You could pass for that one, Ellie." I shudder and another wave of nausea hits me.

"Who, now?" Grandma asks.

"That bitch." Grandpa says with a spastic flourish of his wrist.

"...Witch," I say, catching on.

"Right..." my grandpa and uncles form a chorus.

Alex puts a glass of white wine next to my empty tumbler. My uncle says, "Ellie was drinking whiskey, Alex."

"I like wine." I say, drinking gratefully.

"I read a study on the heart benefits of red wine," Faye's father muses, scratching at his beard.

"She's drinking white wine," my other uncle points out with a harsh cackle.

"Thanks, Alex."

"You're welcome."

Grandma looks at the beer in front of her. "Where'd this come from?"

"Dark beer has an insane calorie count," Leggy Blonde Number Four chimes in as she sucks on the lemon from her water glass.

"Dark beer used to keep the peasants alive when

food was scarce." Faye's father points out.

"We are Irish." One of the uncles supplies with a grim nod.

"All Irish people aren't peasants." Grandpa shouts at his son.

"I mean, back in the day..."

"Ungrateful bastard," Grandpa mutters over his soup spoon.

"On my side, we're Slovak." Grandma says. "Can someone pass the plate of pierogi?"

"Jacob's wife is Ukrainian." Alex says.

"How do you pronounce her name?" Leggy Blonde Number Gour asks.

Grandma sighs. "It's a shame they couldn't make it this year...But they sent some lovely Medovik in the mail! We can have it for dessert."

"What's that?" I ask.

"She's fat." Grandpa mutters.

"Don't be ridiculous," Grandma says, "if anything, it looks like Ellie doesn't eat nearly enough at that school."

"I think he meant Jacob's wife, Grandma." Alex says patiently. He hasn't touched a thing on his plate.

"She should drink more lemon water," Leggy Blonde Number Four says with a roll of her eyes. "It's so good for digestion, and easy to work into your routine."

"I think Medovik might have lemons in it." Grandma turns to get up, but Alex has handed her the boxed dessert. She sniffs at its contents. "Maybe honey."

"Jacob doesn't mind thick Ukrainian honey." My uncles cackle together until my migraine has achieved its full potential.

Jamie asks, "can it be time for dessert?"

***

Dessert pacifies us, but after-dinner games are what keep this family away from the ever-present threat of aggravated assault. Games pacify everyone, in the same

way that they pacify the mentally unstable. The beauty of games is that the players get just distracted enough to never bother thinking about turning on their care-takers.

I nearly crack my teeth against each other as a bottle explodes against the stone wall. Hoppy fizz and shattered glass rain down onto the floor. Faye's boyfriend laughs, rocks back in his chair, and throws another bottle that nearly hits Alex in the head. Faye smiles and drums long, bright green nails against the table.

Faye is my darling Uncle-Philosopher's daughter. She loves to call herself many things: star-child, free-spirit... But she loves saying "bastard" the most, though. She'll smile and introduce herself to strangers at dinner: "Hello, I'm Faye: resident bastard." Right now, her hair is a pale lavender, but her roots are already showing through again. Her dark hairline frames that ghostly pale face like a full moon in a sky of pitch, and Faye happily floats around in that tar-stricken universe.

Faye smiles at this new lover while he apologizes to Alex. "So sorry, man." He puts a hand on Faye's thigh and squeezes tightly. "This one here cheats, you see, and she gets me all worked up. But I wasn't aiming at you, I swear." Alex nods and his static smile never wavers. Tommy returns a crooked grin to Alex then looks up and takes me in with slurred eyes. "Faye, whoozhis?"

Faye beams at me underneath pounds of mascara and eyeliner. "My god, I've lost the pool!" She springs away from her companion and hurls herself at me in an embrace that squeezes the essence of patchouli into every pore of my skin and every strand of my hair.

"The pool?" I ask, carefully avoiding getting fish-hooked by her large, violent-looking earrings.

"I had a pool going with my dear father about whether or not you were coming this year." Faye giggles and drags me down next to her onto the long wooden bench of the game table.

I chuckle weakly, and try very hard not to meet Alex's gaze. "I know, I know... I'm the damned expatriate

who ran away to university. But you can't have really thought I wouldn't come for Christmas."

Faye plants a sloppy wet kiss on my cheek. "Well, I'm glad you came. You get to meet Tommy now!"

"Is 'Tommy' this lovely-"

Faye cuts me off. "Tommy, this is my little cousin Ellie. She's got a brain bigger than your-"

I cut her off. "So lovely to meet you, Tommy. But I'm actually 'Elle.'" I hold out a hand, and it is met with a grip that is coated in multiple heavy metal rings.

"Elle?" Alex asks.

I shrug my shoulders as Faye deals me into the next hand of cribbage. "'Ellie' never made any sense coming from 'Eleanor.' There aren't any 'I's in 'Eleanor.'"

Alex nods and shaggy, baby-blond hair falls into his eyes. "'Eleanor' never sounded like you, anyway."

"No more than 'Faye' sounds like me," Faye asserts as she makes fifteen on top of Tommy's seven of diamonds. "Ha!" she exclaims, and forcefully shoves her peg into its hole.

"'Faye' sounds like you," I say, moving my peg forward after making a pair on top of Faye's eight of hearts.

"Fuck you, and your pair," Faye says with a smile.

"Okay," Alex says, as he throws down another eight and wins the hand.

I point out, "That's trips, too. It's not just a pair on 31." Alex just shrugs.

"How long are you here for?" Faye asks me.

"Where are you staying now?" I ask Faye.

"They live in Rockland," Alex answers.

I ask, "'They'?"

"We like it," Tommy says. "Faye works in a café in town, but our place is a bit farther out."

"'Our place'?"

"We like it," Faye says with a smile.

***

"Ellie, Elle, wake up."

I groggily peel apart my eyelids with the contempt that is unique to the sleep-deprived. Sleeping in the attic isn't that bad at all; I love the distance from everyone else's bedrooms. There is a laundry room between the attic and the nearest bedroom to the stairs, so it is perfectly isolated. It's usually Alex's room on the frequent nights he stays over with Grandma and Grandpa, but whenever the whole family is in town, he stays tucked away in the lighthouse. The only drawback to the attic is its lack of electric outlets. So when it is dark in there, it is seriously dark. Whoever is leaning over me in the bed hasn't brought a candle or a flashlight.

"Elle, it's Alex. Could you come with me, please?"

I sit up and reach for the flashlight on the nightstand. "What the hell, Alex?"

"It's Faye, she came by and asked us to come out to Rockland with her."

I check the time on my phone. "It's two in the morning."

Alex shrugs. "It sounded urgent. Not like she's asking us out for a night cap in the lighthouse. Like something else."

"She's in the lighthouse?" I ask Alex. I thought I could see him nod. "Do you want to go?"

Alex backs away from the bed and stares at his feet. "No, but I think we have to, right?"

I hesitate for a moment, then swing my legs out from under the covers. "I'll be dressed in a minute if you'll wait in the laundry room."

"Alright," he says, turning to leave.

"Alex," I hiss in the darkness.

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry I've put you out of your room."

I catch his face in the flashlight beam as he says, "It's not my room."

***

Alex helps Faye to the long wooden bench at the game table. A small storm is brewing outside in a cauldron of tension and sea salt, and thunder shakes the walls of the lighthouse at jarring intervals. I hand her a cup of tea. My hair is still a bit damp from the drizzle that had started on the way from the house.

"Did you wake anyone up?" Faye asks me.

"No, I don't think so."

"Do you want some ice?" Alex asks her.

"No," Faye says as she touches her swollen cheek. "I'd like for this to bruise really well for the morning." There was a pause, and then she smiles and says, "I want to play a game."

"Faye, we should-"

Faye cuts me off. "We should play a game," she says forcefully.

After a brief silence, Alex goes over to the chest of drawers. He rifles through the drawer full of various decks of playing cards. "What would you guys like to play? More cribbage? Poker, maybe?" He pulls open the lower drawers. "Dominoes? Scrabble?"

Faye shoves a box at Alex's chest. "This one." She turns to the cooler and starts pulling out bottles of beer and wine. "Grab the whiskey and crème de menthe, would you, Alex?"

"Faye, I don't want to do this," I say in a small voice while Faye searches for glasses, and returns with a mismatched set of teacups, grinning from ear to ear. "If you want to talk, let's talk- I'd understand that-..."

"You can understand this!" Faye exclaims through a thickness in her throat. "Don't pretend you can't. Don't pretend you're above it. That's what we do, right? If family's in town, we play games, play pretend, play, goddammit." She hikes up her shirt to show a half-done patch of black thorns and roses on her ribcage that are surrounded by the beginnings of bruises sprouting across her stomach. "You're not part of this family until you've made a dozen bad decisions. So what if I'm up on

everyone else right now? Someone's bound to take the pot after me, just you watch."

I shake my head, and grumble, "No one wants the fucking pot."

Faye grabs me around the neck and kisses the top of my head. "I know you don't."

I disentangle myself, struggling not to smile. "Stop it. I'm a grown-ass woman, and you dragged me out of bed at two in the morning. I'm not little enough to want to play with you anymore."

"Pretend to be," Faye says with finality, taking a seat on the bench and filling her yellowed teacup with whiskey.

"Fine," I say. "Here's to pretending." I pour a shot for myself in a chipped teacup, and drink it down with a grimace. I look over the colorful board and its pieces that Alex has spread out on the table. "I don't remember how to play this."

Faye smiles at me, but can't quite manage a full grin through the pain. "It's Candy Land, Ellie. It doesn't take a genius to play."

"Ages three and up," Alex says quietly.

"Unless you play it my way," Faye says, lining up various bottles. "Listen up, kiddos. You land on a green space, you drink, simple enough. You hit Gumdrop Pass, you hit that bottle of crème de menthe. You hit Gramma Nutt, you hit the beer. You hit Princess Lolly, you hit the wine. Lord Licorice resides over the whiskey, and if you hit the Candy Castle… well, you're just fucked."

"I thought getting to the Candy Castle was winning," I say, hesitantly lining up my starting place on the board.

Faye smiles and draws a card. "There's no winning, Ellie." Faye moves onto a purple space.

"Elle," Alex corrects her as he draws and hits the crème de menthe in the gumdrop pass. "That is revolting."

"Grandma puts it in hot chocolate," I say, as I visit

Lord Licorice and his bastard brother, Jack.

Faye laughs with a manic volume that makes me crease the card in my hand. "I doubt she does that for the taste, kiddos." We play in silence for a few minutes. My head begins swimming unpleasantly. I have no idea how to distinguish the unpleasantness that comes from this disgusting mix of alcohols, from the unpleasantness that comes from the storm, or from the unpleasantness that hangs on the curves and edges of Faye's smiles.

"This moves faster than I remember," Alex says, as he bows to Princess Lolly and the bottle of merlot with a slight sway to his eyes. Faye tries to grab the bottle from him when she lands there as well, but there is a skirmish of contact, and the bottle falls onto the board. Red seeps into the pastel cardboard. Princess Lolly and Queen Frostine are the first to be stained. Faye snatches the bottle and tosses it against the wall. The smell of the wine mixes with the electrical, damp aroma of the storm in the air.

"Is that enough, Faye?" I ask with a fair amount of poison in my tone.

Her green nails shake as she sinks down onto the hard, cold bench. "I'm really sorry, kiddos." She forces a watery smile. "I just wanted to feel something like day time. Not like a few hours from now day-time. Like when things are still... you know?"

"This family was never bright, Faye," I say as gently as I can. "Can we get on with this, then?"

"Do you think you're safe to drive?" she asks me.

"God, no."

Faye smiles, and stands up on a foal's legs. "Good. You're ready."

***

I turn my attention to the open doorway. After walking through the door and drinking in the scene, I immediately turn to look at Alex. Faye has moved on into

the apartment and made a bee-line for the bedroom, but Alex remains frozen in place at the threshold, choking on the scene.

On a deeply scratched coffee table, there is an ornate glass bong stuffed with wilted daisies like an offbeat vase. The refrigerator door hangs open like a gaping maw that reeks of warm dairy. The white shag carpeting is dingy, with a rainbow-gray spectrum of stains. Alex's skin drains of a hundred colors in a second when he notices the fresh splash of color adorning one of the sickly-pale walls. The apartment's walls all have the cold grayness to them that is unique to hospital rooms, but this wall particularly looks like it has come straight out of surgery.

When Alex finally steps through the doorway, he goes straight to the refrigerator, and shuts its door. Loose peas squish under his feet as he moves slowly toward Faye's bedroom with a feline kind of caution. There might as well have been land mines under the plush carpet.

I go ahead and flick on the overhead light, and wince at the rush of harsh fluorescent lights. There are dozens of dead insects in the lighting fixtures, all piled on top of each other, casting shadows around the room at odd angles. The gaping refrigerator door had been a poor source of light. Now, the fine red spatter against the pallid walls seems even more urgent when bathed in the cold, artificial light.

I regard the mound of crumpled bills on the counter and identify stacks of one's and five's. Whatever circle Faye has spiraled down into, Alex and I are with her now. Family often feels like an eternal, inevitable downward spiral that tugs on your ankles despite how hard you kick against the currents. This feels par for the course.

Faye is kneeling on her bed, silently crying, when we enter the bedroom. The state of this room is much worse than the common room. I have the feeling that a blacklight would go absolutely berserk in here from the

multitude of suspiciously sticky surfaces. But what is more disconcerting is the way that Tommy is sprawled on the bed, partly hanging off the side, and laying facedown into a mussed comforter. There is a dark pool staining the center of the bed.

"Faye..." Alex whispers in a choked tone.

"It wasn't my fault," Faye screeches through a pale whimper. "He was fine, really. He did this-" Faye indicates her swollen eye. "And he kept going in on me, on my ribs, so I grabbed... something and hit him with it, I can't remember what, now... But he was fine! His head was bleeding, but he just got off me, walked away, and did a few lines in the kitchen." Faye's voice is becoming hoarse and faded. She takes a deep, shaky breath. "That's when he fell down, and... I couldn't call anyone, because I did hit him, you see? And I dragged him in here, but I just need..." She pulls a cigarette out of her pocket and holds shaking fingers up to her mouth.

"Our help," I spit, feeling nauseous. Faye remains silent and won't look at me.

"I wasn't thinking clearly!" Faye says through a blush.

"Help me, now." Alex helps her open the window.

"Alright, now... help me, Alex." Faye grabs Tommy by one arm, and his head lolls comically backwards as she sags under his weight. I notice a sticky, colorful smile painted on his face in a clown's yellow and red. Faye and Alex move Tommy back into the living room and onto the couch under the blood-spattered wall. Faye flits back to the kitchen counter, and makes sure the cocaine is in plain sight. "Okay... The place is rented in his name, so, as far as tracing it back to me..." Faye starts taking stacks of cash off the counter and shoves them into my handbag.

"If they catch us going out this time, we are prowlers," she says forcefully. Faye goes back into the bedroom and comes out with the comforter rolled up in her arms. She gives it to Alex. "Leave out the front way with this," she tells him. "And then, when you're out of sight, call the police."

"But you guys-"

Faye cuts off Alex's protestations. "Go! I've got Ellie." Faye grabs me by the wrist and drags me back into the bedroom. She climbs out of the window. "Come on!" she urges me.

"Why?" I am suddenly on the verge of tears as I feel my heartbeat racing away with me. "Why do I have to? Why does Alex have to... Why can't...we..."

Faye drags me through the sticky open window and catches me as I clumsily make my way onto the roof. "Because, Elle, when family messes up... this bad, the only people who will help are... blood."

I scratch once more at my face, but then feel suddenly grateful that my face isn't bare. It is always better to approach this sort of lunacy with a mask on. At least in the movies, they always have masks on. The distant wail of sirens lets me know that we are out of time.

I take hold of Faye's hand. "It's not going to be okay, but..."

Faye smiles at me. "Just jump. ...And maybe cross your fingers."

ABOMINATION 113692

ZOE BELEW

I could remember everything but my name. They only called me 113692.
Namelessly, however, I am an abomination.

Initially, I was meant to be the new generation of "Better Body, Better Life," but that all ended when the company exploded in some unexplainable event. I wasn't present for the cataclysmic demolition of that rusted, caving warehouse in the middle of Nowhere Nevada, but I wish I had been. It would have been beautiful to see, especially in my last humane moments on earth. That stunning explosion with an array of brilliant yellows, fluorescent oranges, and that billowing black smoke which hung in the sky like a stage curtain. It could have been my last hurrah; my final tribute to the damned existence they gave me.

Them.

Yes, them. Those adolescent, ignorant scientists who worried for nothing but building and rebuilding, killing and sewing, changing and rearranging. From experience, I can say that one's arm is never to touch certain areas of the body, and an independent eyeball sprung from a fish does not belong where nostrils should be. Disgusting. Monstrous. These are the things they did to "improve" the world, one generation at a time. I, myself, was a member of the sixth group to pass my way through those damp and cold metal-lined hallways. They told us we were going to watch a transition involving the latest and greatest in technology. They lied.

They trapped us like cattle and then ushered

us into confusing catacombs jailed away in the warehouse basement, each of us getting our own room. I cannot say how long I waited, but it felt as if months had passed before my door finally opened. I wished for daylight to greet me, but all I saw was an elderly man covered in a stark green quarantine suit. He had guards with him; I suppose they expected me to fight them off. In some way, I suppose I wanted to as well, but I walked out freely and, blessedly, on my own two feet. Honestly, I wish I had looked down at those feet, considering it was the last time they were my own.

They never gave choices when it came to remastering their latest product. We were victims to these scientists, and they pulled and plucked us apart like puzzle pieces only to match us with things that never should have fit. I began as a petite, black haired girl with broad hips and wide shoulders. I walked out of that warehouse with metal arms, gills at my throat, a third eye, and uncontrollable flippers as feet. They wanted us to be the generation to survive the rising water levels by molding our bodies for land and sea without going through multiple evolution cycles. Instead, they murdered our images and sent us on our way without as much as a wave.

I never looked back at that disgusting place, and I never saw another mutant leave the place after the doors were locked behind me. The last I saw of the place, it was a pile of scraps, and it was the last place I ever saw a body. Even now, striding along the Las Vegas strip under collapsing buildings and dimmed LEDs, I am alone. There is no one left in this forsaken world, and despite the silver heart encrusted in my aluminum chest plate, I have no desire to live forever. There is no urge to continue living with their

advancements. For fifty years, I have meandered my way from state to state, country to country, and touched every body of water in the world. The views are old and redundant, and I am bored of this life. Yet, because of their actions, I can no longer rid myself of this place by moving on.

I am the last member of this world. I am 113692.

I am an abomination.

SOCIETY

BRIANNA GARNER

Part I:

We're evil, and we know you can feel us. We press down on you, we surround you. And now? Well now you're manufactured. You are a manipulation of our thoughts, a manipulation of what we think you should be. We know you gave up long ago, we've seen the light die from your eyes. But do you blame us? No because we've taught you to only blame yourself, to only hate yourself.

We can hear your thoughts and see your doubts. We know you're afraid. Is it the ridicule that brought you to that razor, and how about those looks? Are they the reason you're vomiting? Yes, but does it matter? You're ten pounds lighter and scars are easy to hide. Humanity is nothing but imperfection, so why not strive for excellence? This is love, why are you upset?

We degrade you, we make you hate yourself- but it's all a process. One day you'll see that we made you lovable, we made you perfect. What else could life be about? Let the hatred guide you, let it make you into someone who is worthy. But we see you. We see you grab the razor one too many times, we see the vomit overflowing the toilet- did you even eat today? We hope not.

We see the blood, and we know your time has come. You were weak and unworthy of affection; you failed us. We see the funeral, we make them cry for you- it's what they should do, but no one feels sympathy. You failed to do what they did- you failed

to change. We see you as the coffin closes. Will it make you happy to know that this is the look we wanted all along?

Part II:

We separate you, we cast you into desolate ponds of your own kind. You wonder what it's like, what they know, and it's the wondering that causes the anger. You search for answers, the answers we hold, but you'll never know. Why you ask? Because hatred is easier with separation, and hatred is all we live for. Hatred is the only thing keeping us alive.

We our your enemy, but you do not see us. You see the difference in color, and we make you relate that to superiority. What would life be like without us? We'll never let you know. We aim to destroy, and our destruction is aimed at you. You ask if you're different from each other, but it's not that simple. Not with us to remind you.

We're the cause for the past, the past they hold on to so tightly. We are the stereotypes, the anger, the acts of indiscretion. There will never be equality, and it's our fault. We see the wars begin, and we know you hear our whispers to continue. Think about what they did to you, think of their offenses. But where they ever really there? Were they just defending themselves from injustice? Now you'll never know because the work is done. The wars have begun, and who do you have to blame? Yourself.

We whisper in your ears, we boil your rage. You're an animal in our cage. The beast, though, that's you. We manipulate you to do our bidding, but we know you feel it. They must pay, shouldn't they? The wars must continue because death is the ultimate

sacrifice for those that are less than you. But what are the screams for? What agonies are they enduring? Didn't they know it was their time? No, but one day I'll know when it's mine because wars are never won.

Part III:

We cracked the mirror long ago, didn't you notice. Nothing is never as it seems anymore. That man you thought you knew so well? He thought it was okay. He thought you were faking the pain, those screams forced his momentum further. And now? We make you blame yourself. Every reaction is based on you, but you didn't sign up for this did you?

We've seen you gagging in the morning. Is it the smell? Is it the remaining taste of blood that he cause in your mouth? Maybe not. Maybe it's the child that you ignore everyday. The one that is growing out of anger, out of hatred. It's the fear that you never knew could exist, and we make it happen.

You know it's your fault. It's your mistake that led us here isn't it? But what will your choice be? There is a constant ticking inside of your head, don't you hear the countdown begin? Probably not because your destruction began long ago. It began when you didn't feel beautiful, didn't it? Was that our fault, too? Yes. We made you into this machine.

You weren't beautiful. You were new, unscathed; you had to be tortured. Not only at our hands, but at the hands of those around you. The judgment led you here, did it not? The pain you felt, that is only the beginning of what we see as beauty. There is always a price to pay, and beauty is your slave master. It owns your every thought and action. But what will you choose? Will you end both lives or

only one?

You know the judgment will come. How do you know? Because your body isn't yours, we own it. You are our property. We dictate what you do and how you feel, and now we'll end this. We'll take the life that was a result of your actions, and we know inside you'll die as well because you were already dead after that night. Is it not fair? Does that matter? No because it's our choice to decide. We our Society, and we are your life.

THE FIELDS OF ALETHEIA

ADELLA HERRON

To my parents.

I remember well, too well, the inclement albeit quiet shuddering of my small, one-man SafeDrop-Pod as I descended the great crest of space. I watched from behind the porthole the black infinite as it melted away into the countless hues of an orange, red, and amber sky; and within my isolated pod I heard only the beating of my heart crying out against the loneliness of my sunken soul. The sun never looked so big in the sky, for on Aletheia it knew no horizon.

And as I took in my first breath since the launch (the first breath that was not limited to fear since I could remember) I saw falling outside, all around me, the one-thousand pods; they were like tears set on fire: silent in their burning wake but, by Jove, with the secret emotion, the hidden devastation, of an unfathomable future.

Tawny clouds grew distant from above as the planet's surface neared ever so close. It was a surface of desolation encrimsoned with the devouring heat of the burning sun; it was a scorched face branded with craters and valleys and hills and dry river beds whose very own formations were foreign to the precious existence of H2O.

When the pods hit the surface in a simultaneous combustion of jagged gravel and smoldering rock, the stinging winds suddenly froze their flights across the sky and the stars fled fearfully over the edge of the horizon.

Only the enraged face of the sun spat at us from above. Before I could grasp reality, the truth behind my presence here, I found myself crossing, stomping, the wretched plains that were at once so very far away. A thousand men following me for the first time, I never knew what responsibility meant until that day. I never knew what pride meant until that moment.

Two-thousand vigilant eyes glared across the solemn distance, across the sea of the whispering desert, where the foundations of our mission stood, built in ancient rock from a time long before us. Before civilization. Before Earth. And by 0800 those very foundations fell to the dusted paths of futile memory.

Now, here I stand. Surrounded not by the falling pods of one-thousand soldiers, nor the haunting faces of those we took under the sword, but surrounded by a thousand flowers waving under the influence of an alien breeze.

I stand here, under new blue skies where the same sun lingers closest. It could burn us (and in doing so avenge the lost) but like every other obstacle we confronted we found a way to pierce the shell.

The altered horizon behind me lights up our ill-gotten triumph, and I cannot help but wonder to myself as my masked face gazes across the rainbow shores. As verdigris eats the buried armor of the fallen, guilt eats at mine. I cannot see my guilt, yet I know it stains in infinite shades of red. Invisible, yet it shows in the trembling of my gloved hands and in the throbbing of my mind. It is the choking in my throat.

The same field for which I stand in holds beneath its floral surface the history that nearly everyone has forgotten by now. I have returned to the place of battle. The place where ancient foundations and ancient creatures fell in an ocean of forever lasting forgetfulness. From the bodies of the innocent dead, sprung afterward the blooms of our victory.

Can Time not cease its ever-lasting laceration on my mere human soul? Can I not save but one ghost from the eternal chains that were built by the hands of terrestrial gods?

AN ECHO TO NARCISSISM

CHELSEA YATES

"Please, get out of my head. I don't think those things," Taliesin shook her head vigorously at her reflection in the water. "At all."

But it wasn't her reflection staring back. It looked like her, could have even been her twin, but it wasn't her. Despite the flowing golden threads of hair, a heart shaped feminine face, and heavily fringed lashes this person staring back at her was a man. His light, gentle voice pooled through her head containing warmth and love and something else... unsettling.

She bent down until her head was nearly touching the water, "I don't know who you are, a g-g-g-ghost or some foul demon, but you should be gone from here at once," She wriggled nervously under his stare and whispered, "Plus, people are beginning to look at me strangely. For talking to you."

Taliesin looked up from the spring. Caught staring at her the villagers sprang back into motion, scurrying away. The receding echo of their feet upon grassy green caused her to breathe a sigh of relief.

She gazed once more upon him, "It's getting dark; I must go."

The brilliant fire of the sun was dipping low over the horizon. A slow dusk descended. Dreamy saffron and vibrant pink tones faded, replaced with a stilted melancholy. Dark plum velvet hues drew down their curtains of night. This deep shroud brought forth no smattering of stars across an ebony prison. Once the sun slipped below out of sight, the caressing wind turned chilling and somber.

"Are you afraid of the dark?" The voice spoke startling Taliesin's attention back to it. Before the water shimmered with life, but now the bleak swirls made the water appear harsher, deeper. Like it went on forever

and if she was yanked in she would be catapulted into a different realm. That being said she felt an invisible pull on her arm. It was not going to relinquish her until it was finished here.

"Of course. Aren't you?" The dark was a mystery, part of the unknown. In this silence, only swayed by the leaves rustling in the wind, a weight pressed heavily upon her. Her eyes darted to and fro, searching the shadows.

She really had to go. Being late was no good. Someone was bound to be looking for her.

He only smiles, the dark twisting it, "I will show you."

"No. Nope. No, need to be shown. You can just tell me. I'll listen. It's not like I can go anywhere," She chuckled nervously, "All ears. Fire away."

But she was already tumbling. Down, down. The cool touch of the pond rippling behind her, the water immersed her fully. Without a moment's time to prepare most of the breath whooshed out of her lungs. Icy cold entered her nose and mouth, filling her. Taliesin clutched at her burning throat.

Above her, the silhouettes of branches and sky grew fainter. Noises beyond the water dulled to a dismal quiet. The last pale complexion of dusk tunneled out of sight until she was surrounded by a murky blackness, devoid of sound or a lasting color.

Bubbles created a vortex she hurtled into. Her head swam, a numbness seeping through her limp limbs. Lightheaded and so very heavy she spiraled further into the chasm of never ending deep. The last air bubbles escaped from her convulsing throat. Her mouth floundered open and closed, eyes straining. A void ate away all remaining thoughts, sedating her.

Still Taliesin hung on to life. A voice whispered to her that she had to clutch it for all its worth. She was loved, needed. And she couldn't die in a place like this when she loathed darkness for dark made her feel isolated and unsure of where to turn.

A light built in Taliesin's heart, burning brighter. It wouldn't be extinguished easily.

When she thought oblivion would take her she let loose one wet, hacking cough. Water poured out from her mouth as she flopped on dry land. She could have kissed the very earth. She blew a sopping wet strand of hair out of her face.

There stood her look-a-like, dead-center in the havoc. Tears streamed from his eyes as he held out his hand towards her. In this perpetual night, he emitted a soft glow that made him visible despite visibility being poor.

Ringing in her ears a war horn sounded out its final bellow.

Flipping from scene to scene, all noise was convoluted and images grainy. Fire reigned from the skies along with the fallen stars. Rocks and flames burst upon the world, creating a crater. Scorching pressure turned the stones black and a river of lava filled up the hole as hot embers spilled over. The flames rose higher and higher. No green abounded, just singed charcoal lumps. Thick smog covered the sky, hazing the air with swirls of smoke. Taliesin coughed and sputtered, trying to rid herself of the vapors clogging up her throat and nose.

Despite the balls of heat, a cold desolate wind blew. Snow flittered down, stinging and lashing its powdered vengeance from all directions. She shivered so hard her teeth chattered.

Creatures, out of fables, tore the world asunder with their breath, teeth, and claws. Giants made of frost pummeled their fists together as they continued their death march. A beast with a glowing set of ruby eyes swallowed the moon while another of the same visage devoured the sun. A long reptilian tail wrapped itself around the world, crushing houses and leaving its mark through the earth. Dust and bones scattered as its coils tightened.

Every time she took a step, Taliesin was pushed back, but somehow she made it to her mirror image and

locked fingers with his.

Her mirror reflection kneels down before her, tipping her chin up, "It's decided. We are one. I'll never be alone. Forever," His once bright eyes are glassy, "Save me. Please, Talie. Please."

"But you're right here," Why does he need saving? And from who? "Can't you save yourself? What does this have to do with me?"

But he's not even listening and even though a bit of Taliesin ached inside for him, she knew that none of this was real. Everything was a dream and soon like all dreams she would wake up.

As if on cue, the world around her began to disintegrate. An earthquake that jostled her left and right leaving her disoriented. Her twin self was nowhere to be found.

Days upon days went by with her doubting his existence and if this was her true world or the world he came from. From out of a pond. The reflection, her almost reflection, called to her with fantasies and compliments.

The guy who looked almost identical to her, what if she saw him again in those still waters? Would he take her with him? It stood to reason that he would, since he needed her help. How else would she get to him? She felt an over-whelming urge to be with him. If she saw him again, even if he was only a reflection, she knew she would dive in after him where she could melt and merge with the waters.

They had only just met. She was probably going crazy. She wondered if this is how suicidal people felt, talking themselves into the deed before becoming drowned. Was that what she was doing?

She had to go back! Ditching her work she took the ill-begotten path, brushing away brambles and scurrying through thickets until she came to the very same spot he appeared all of those days ago.

Taliesin fell to her knees, splashing ruddy water on the fabric of her dress, bleaching the white to translucent.

The sudden movements caused the animals to scamper away, whether by hoof or wing, back into the safety of their nests, their burrows.

Back in the rippling waters, a deformed, grubby face stared back at her. She scooted away to the edge of the water, peering over. Waiting till the water stilled and her reflection was back to normal. That was the problem; it was her reflection, not his.

"Hello?" No response, "I'm back."

The water shifted.

Her nails scarped into the dirt, making small furrows into the sodden earth as she tried again, "I thought about it and I'm ready to help you. Tell me how. Are you stuck under there?"

More shapes snaking up, slithering across the surface. Should she try reaching into the water? Maybe she would end up on another side of a different world again.

"Is a different place under there? Is it closer to the gods or the devils under there?" Hesitant hands reached forward. Nearly skimming, something reacted, lurching up towards her hand. She retracted it a little, squared her shoulders, and then inched closer to the swarming black water once again. Inky trails shadowed the movements her hand made.

A hand dipped into the water, blackness converged.

All the while her mind chanted, take me to him. Take me there. Take me.

It latched onto her, binding her arm in twisted designs. Searing pain, she screamed. Birds scattered from trees, her loud voice scaring them off.

Her arm wouldn't budge no matter how much she pulled or clutched on to the roots of a plant, clawing her way back from the water. Hot and cold spiked along her arm. Taliesin began to sink, the more purchase she lost, the more her body became exposed to the black. It felt like it was eating away at her skin, lapping up what little

light she had.

Black. Black. No one was coming for her. When she died this world would die with her. Rotten core. Grow sticky with blood and the loud cries turn to silence.

No, this wasn't her. Think happy: of finding a four-leaf clover or reading smutty romance novels by the fireside.

"Please," Her voice was hoarse, cheeks wet with crystal tears. "Let me go, please. Please!"

Tainted light spun farther away in the pool and she saw who she wanted to see. His cornflower eyes, aquiline nose, hair like welded sunlight, perfectly innocent mouth, and baby face soothed her spirit. His form was hazy as he reached a hand towards her, smooth long fingers just a short distance away.

"I can't," She shook her head.

He suddenly looked incredibly distant and the expression his face was making pained her, "I need you. Just as you need me. You're the only one who can help me."

"But it hurts," Fiery pain lanced up her arm, expanding to singe her shoulder in smudged black characters.

"Keep gazing deep into my eyes; I'll bear the pain with you. Listen to me and your cares will melt away," Why wasn't he the one coming closer instead of these black things then? "My fake girl, feel it. This world was never yours. You secretly hate it, those people you call friends. Will they ever love you, the real you, you ask. Be one with me for I will never hate, I will only ever love my sweet, beautiful dark light."

She whimpered, feeling what he said to be true the more she looked into his bottomless eyes. Staring, she felt the painful cold fire become faint, an aching shadow sensation that now only stung. It was a trifle. The world, she didn't need to tear her gaze away from his to see this colorless, glass-like world for what it was. A world with zero purpose or real, tangible relations.

In the back of her mind, she could see her friends turning their illusory backs on her. Their paper feelings obliterated when they realized it they never even liked her to begin with. One by one, gone as if they never existed. And in her heart maybe they never did.

She wet her lips, "What's it like? Your world?"

"You can be a goddess. Worshipped, cherished and make it a world that suits your taste," Passion laces his voice, "The two of us. As long as you're with me, my truth, that blinding world will become clear. No more alone. No more dark or dishonest intentions. You can be my eyes and I yours."

All Taliesin needed to do was take his hand. Then, everything would be better. Such pure blue eyes didn't lie.

A mass of dark pulled another piece of her in. She was submerged up to her neck, the slimy water tickling her collarbone. The water hadn't reached her nose yet, but she felt as if it had. The back of her throat was sweltering, the sludge like a vise about her neck. It was almost as if the slime was invading her body, oozing into it through her pores. An aching cough racked her, the sound rattling her chest.

"No more alone," She repeated the words slowly as a child would.

For about the fourth time that night her eyes sought out not his, but the moon's. Empty. Her chest felt hollow, heart pounding in her ears.

"I'll go."

Despite better judgment, Taliesin sunk in deeper. She let go of the shore, letting her feet slip until only a mixture of his and her face were reflected. Nearly fully under, the tar weighed her body in place as she kicked, fingertips almost brushing his. Black suffused her vision along with a dull thrumming pain. The tar was so thick; her arms didn't want to push through that last barrier.

"Talie..." She distantly heard her voice being called. "Talie!"

Why did the voice sound so frantic? Everything is

going to be alright, she just wanted to say.

"Taliesin," The sound of her name echoed around her skull as she stopped to make out the rest of the words, "Don't leave this world so easily!"

With a hacking cough and a dwindling vision her body was hauled back on shore. The face, his light, no! He was leaving her. Weakly she fought back with noodle arms and flopping feet. So close!

A frustrated rasp left her, as she shivered in her wet clothes. If she could get back in, he would welcome her, accept her. Struggling with her captor Taliesin made it to the edge of the pool. The water was blank, only her pathetic face stared back at her mournfully.

NOOOOO! A clump of muddy hair fell into her eyes. Taliesin was wrestled and pinned down on her back.

Someone she had never noticed before, but who was always there towered over her, crushing her in his arms. Her heart sped up as she soaked in his warmth. The chills gradually subsided as did the darkness within her heart, replaced with light.

"I love you."

Everything was going to be okay. She didn't need that artificial world anymore. She just needed to believe.

FACES

CHELSEA YATES

"If I am a terrible person strike me down," Shiloh stood drenched in the pouring rain. Lightning streaked the skies above as she twirled and laughed straining her pale hands towards the sky, "Sear this very patch of earth and me with it." She stopped motionless, eyes bright and smiling, lips curled. There was a manic flush to her cheeks, but the darkness obscured it just like in this very moment it swallowed her heart. "Well?"

The woman on the doorstep trembled. Even though she was eclipsed by the soft glows of light she might as well have been steeped in darkness for she was coming to the conclusion that she was alone in this world with only her grief for company, "B-but my husband is this house."

"Your husband is dead Madame," Shiloh cocked her head to the side; "Let me prove it to you."

"No. No. Stop," Hunched over the woman shook her head, planting her hands over her ears to block out the possibility, "He's not. He's watching over me, this wood is his skin, the hearth is his heart, can't you feel him... he's here. I-I am not alone. He's here. He didn't leave me..."

"A house is a house. If your husband is truly a piece of planks and nails, he should stop me," Then, she walked, striding to the entrance of the house and nudging the wide-eyed woman aside. "Otherwise your husband will truly be sent to the afterlife and you with him."

Shiloh had no need for this house after all, only the land and the things within. Water dripped from her clothes onto the pristine carpet. Plop, plop, plop.

Once inside, the house seemed to pulse with life. The warm air was already beginning to dry the water from her skin, but she didn't feel the heat. Still felt cold.

Had to be done. Had. To. Be.

If she repeated the mantra often enough maybe she could fool herself. It seemed to be working as long as she cast all emotions aside and thought of nothing, but her role. *I am clay, easily molded and morphed into shape. Clay can take whatever form it wants to take. Soon this me will be gone, slip right into oblivion, and I will become someone else.*

So, do not take heart. Right, in this moment, you do not exist. Someone else with your face is doing these things. Someone else. This is all a lie. A lie.

And at least for now while her mind was occupied with the task at hand, Shiloh believed it. This her came naturally.

So she kept her strides long and powerful, her gait confident. She was the sheer image of presence: weight counterbalanced as she shifted her mass to one foot, shoulders at ease, and head held high, her nose pointed down, eyebrows slightly raised, and lips twisted into a nasty sort of grin. Despite her haughty countenance Shiloh seemed almost feral as if no human being pushed its way into the house, but some foul thing spat up from the very abyss itself. Her dark, rain-soaked hair tangled down the length of her back and those piercing eyes lacked any warm textures or feeling.

A gasp escaped the nearly sunken in woman as Shiloh brandished the lantern burning bright near the far wall on an oaken desk. Fire danced in her eyes. Shadows played across the walls, stretching out to eclipse part of her face. The light was lifted up, admired as it slowly spun around in Shiloh's hands.

"Please," The woman gave a hoarse cry, lashes spiking with tears. Her arms quaked, wrapping in on herself.

"But don't you want to know the truth?" Shiloh stepped closer with the lantern, bending down until she was eye-level with the trembling form, "The truth will set you free."

Shutting her eyes tight, the woman scrambled

back, knees buckling as she slipped on the placement mat, landing on her hands out in the damp. No moves were made to help her. Not by some house, the spirit of her dead husband, or the demon in front of her. The rain mixed with her tears, white garments becoming see-through, body bare and exposed, and no one would come.

Big fancy estate, polished memorabilia, formal invitations to attend galas, all the social standing in the world; yet, what was the point? Her husband died in a "carriage accident." What a great "tragedy" since his land and titles granted him with a fortune, he was a good-natured fellow, a real charmer at events, and had a caring wife whom he left distraught after his sudden death. More like he died by divine punishment, if you believe in that sort of thing. What was left out of the story was that seconds before his death he was giving some young lord's daughter a rather, passionate farewell kiss and then tripped and broke his neck while stepping out of the carriage.

Who was Shiloh to judge though? Philandering paled in comparison to her crimes. People did what they had to, to get by whether it was in marriage or life in general after all.

Today this woman was an aristocrat, but tomorrow when her wealthy friends discovered she was chased from her home they wouldn't offer lodgings or fight to claim it back for her. No, the fear of poverty, being something you were able to catch, was too strong. Maybe, Shiloh would be proved wrong. Someone with influence would take pity on the widow or she would catch someone's eye for despite her mousy nature she was still a pretty, little thing.

"G-g-go a-aw-away," Her voice warbled.

Trying to banish Shiloh as if she were the ghost only amused her further, "Let me ask you a question." She set the lantern down next to the woman. It was no longer needed. The flame quickly sputtered out leaving a burnt wick. "Do you still believe your husband resides within this

house?"

The woman looked past her, towards the silent house, and then beyond the house. She waited, eyes finally lowering to the mud beneath her gown, "No."

"That's right. Nothing remains for you in this house. Memories hurt, don't they? You don't have to live another second in an empty place like this," Shiloh retreated into the house, bringing back a wool coverlet, placing it around the woman's dainty shoulders. The woman didn't register the act, her gaze remaining forlorn. "I'll take it, cherish it, and make new memories here. You want that don't you? For this house to remain a happy, treasured space?"

"I want that..." The woman repeated her words back to her numbly.

"Yes, that's what you want," Shiloh put an arm around the woman, leading her away from the house. With zero resistance as if in a trance she followed. "You don't want to be stuck in that house forever. It's confining. It's holding you back. You want to be free, don't you? From the pressure, from the past, no regrets, right?"

The coverlet started to slip, but Shiloh tugged it back up.

"What?"

Shiloh repeated herself, "You want to forget him. He abandoned you. Don't you deserve to be free? By living you can pay him back."

"Is it that easy?" They could no longer see the house. Forest and winding dirt paths surrounded them. Wet leaves crunched under their thin shoes.

"No. It never is, but don't you want to try?"

"I didn't give you my house."

"No, I took it," Shiloh turned disappearing back the way they came, "What you do next is entirely up to you."

"WE KNOW YOU GAVE UP LONG AGO, WE'VE SEEN THE LIGHT DIE FROM YOUR EYES."

Society - Brianna Garner

58. FAUNA DISTACCATO
JEREMY BLACK

59. SUPREME
AUSTIN COYLE

60. AGENDER 1
ELIZABETH DUFOUR

61. AGENDER 2
ELIZABETH DUFOUR

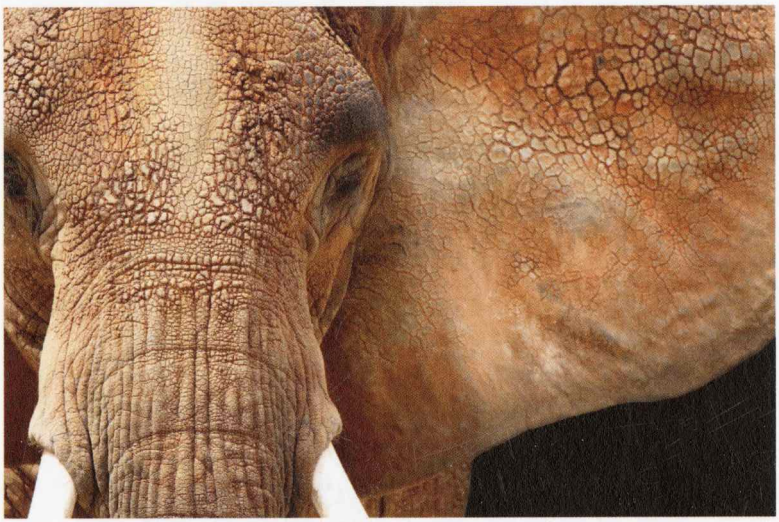
62. ALABAMA
JONATHAN EVANS

63. IAN
JONATHAN EVANS

64. SCUBA DIVER
NATHAN HARPER

65. CREATURE, CRUMBLING, STRANGE, ANTIQUE
AUDREY MECKE

66. BONGO
CAILIN MONROE



FAUNA DISTACCATO

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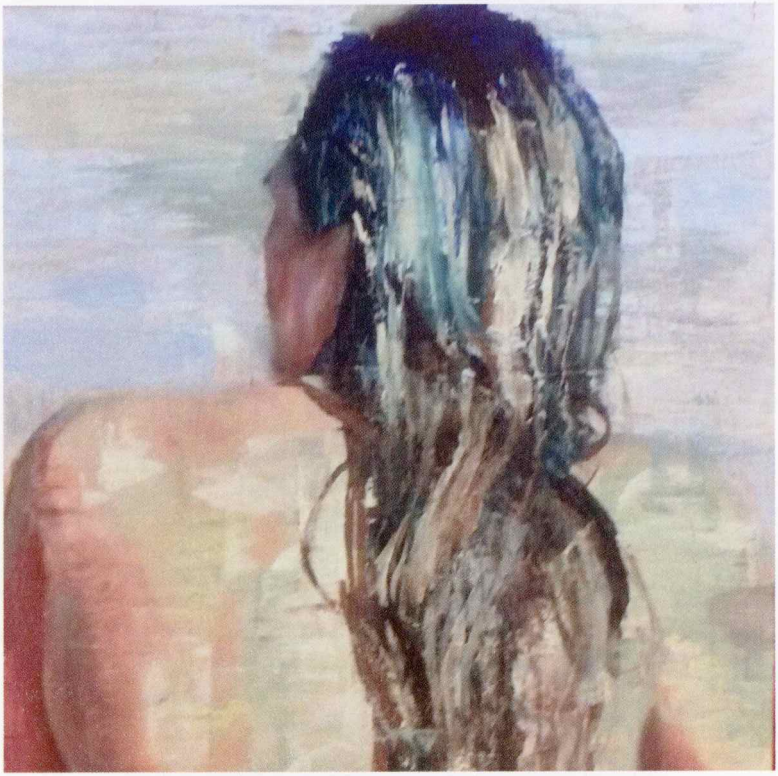


AGENDER 1

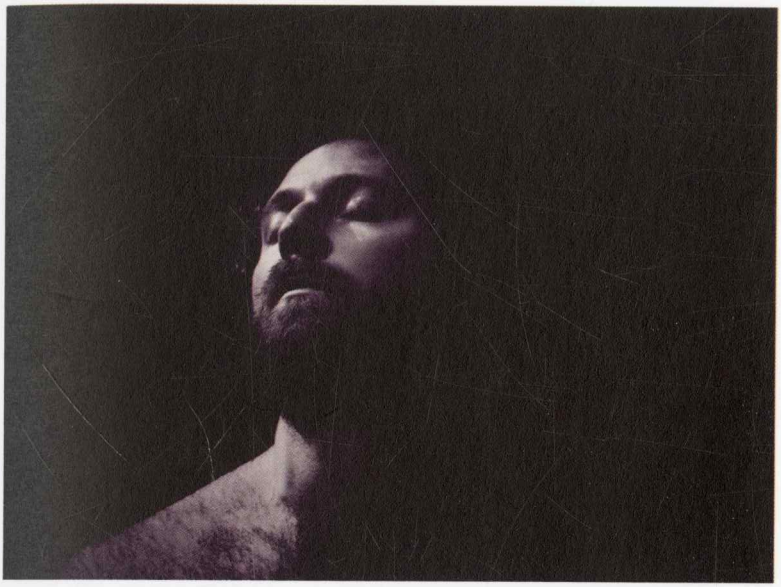
ELIZABETH DUFOUR

AGENDER 2

ELIZABETH DUFOUR

ALABAMA

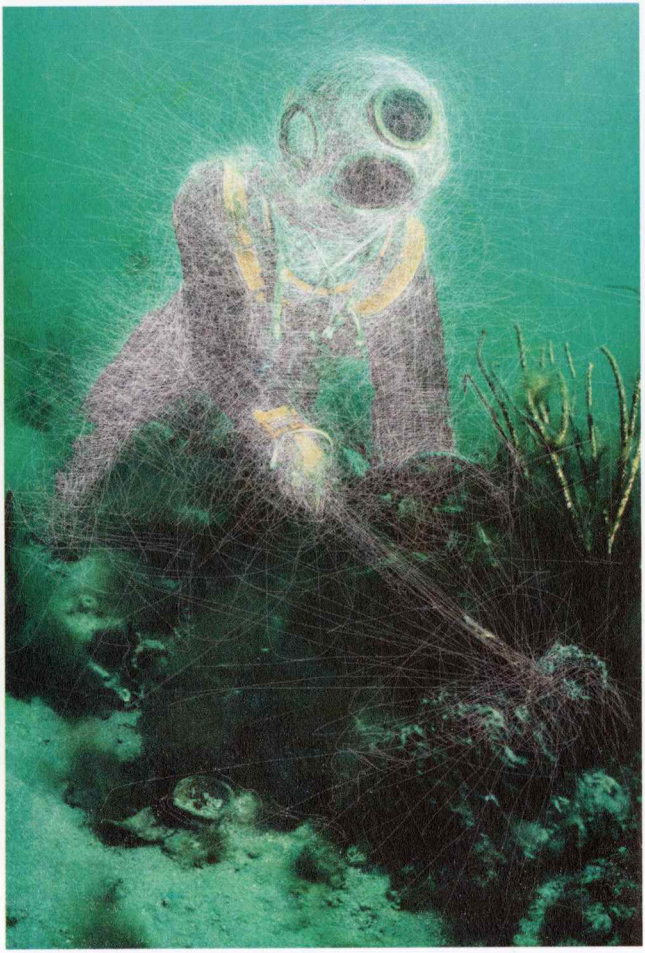
JONATHAN EVANS



IAN

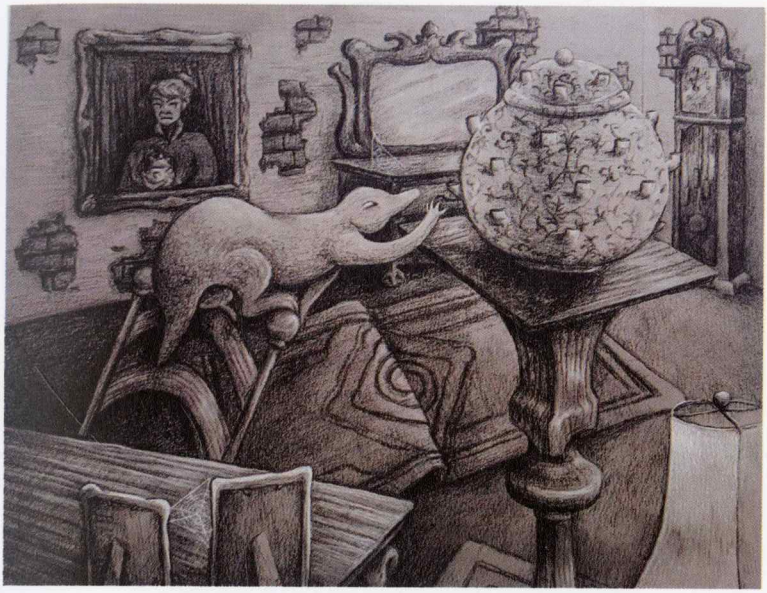
JONATHAN EVANS

63



SCUBA DIVER
NATHAN HARPER

64



CREATURE, CRUMBLING, STRANGE, ANTIQUE

AUDREY MECKE

BONGO

CAILIN MONROE

"I GAVE YOUR CLOTHES TO THE GOODWILL THEN BROKE DOWN CRYING THE NEXT WEEK."

Grief On the Top Refrigerator Shelf - Annika Bastain

70. GRIEF ON THE TOP REFRIGERATOR SHELF
ANNIKA BASTAIN

72.ROSEMARY
DONOVAN CLECKLEY

74. A REFLECTION OF PEACE
BRIANNA GARNER

76. ECSTASY
BRIANNA GARNER

78. HOMEMADE TASTY AMERICAN RECIPE
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82. THE DIRT
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83. EVE AND ADAM ARE DEAD
SARAH SIZEMORE

84. PHOBIC
CHELSEA YATES

GRIEF ON THE TOP REFRIGERATOR SHELF

ANNIKA BASTAIN

I still cook too much.
Even now, some years later,
More food than any one
person could possibly eat.

I wonder if you knew,
That first time you cooked
for me,
When you said
It's no trouble:
Its as easy to cook for two
people as it is for one,
How one way that street ran
How not-easy it is to cook
for one person as it is for
two,
Instead of two.

My fridge is full of
Tupperware containers
I can't bring myself to eat.
I pass your shampoo in the
toiletries aisle.
Pass it like your family
passed your bedside
Slowly, like they'd seen a
ghost
Someone who once was,
But is -less now.

I keep the TV on at night for
white noise.
Static like what runs
through my brain
The same thoughts that
short out every time.
I stop them by drinking
wine from your coffee mug.

I gave your clothes to the
Goodwill
Then broke down crying the
next week
When I saw your
windbreaker on the sales
rack.
I bought it and brought it
home
It hangs in the hall closet
now
Next to everything else that
comes out at night to haunt
me.

I've debated sleeping on the
couch
The bed is too big for one.
But I sent you there so many
times when

I didn't want you beside me
It seems a travesty to send
myself there
When all I want is you
beside me

If I'd known we'd only have
so many nights together
I would never have made
you spend any of them
alone.

Your mom calls.
On birthdays and holidays,
Neither of us who we
Really want to hear from,
But it's enough to hear the
unspoken longing
In each other's voice
And know we're both
wanting the impossible
And willing to settle for less.

Sometimes
When I open my fridge and
look at the
Leftovers
When I open my closet and
clutch at your
Windbreaker
When I open my bathroom
cabinet and see the
Shampoo,
I wonder
If you'd be upset at how we
handled your funeral.

We didn't release any doves.
We didn't play any classic
rock.
We didn't even serve free
drinks.
And I know you wanted all
those.

Instead–
We just cried.
And missed you.
I suppose,
In a way,
I am still at your funeral,
Standing in the back
My arms full of Tupperware
containers
Dressed a windbreaker a bit
too big,
Hair smelling of generic
brand anti dandruff
shampoo,
Crying, and missing you,
Wondering
Why do I have so much
food?
I cooked enough for two.

ROSEMARY

DONOVAN CLECKLY

As you perceive—
and objectify—me
with your graded checklist
from one to ten
of what is deemed
"handsome,"
you can carry on grading
"handsome" men
who will reshape you as
their Creature.
You may appear as the main
attraction
when you're only the guest
feature,
but, from this lovely stigma,
you know you're alive.
They may take
you for a drive;
they might take
your sex for ransom,
but they're above the
number five
on your scale
of objectified, physically-
judged "handsome."

Tell me I'm dark haired,
and tell me to bleach it.
Kiss my hand in the night
air,
if you can even see it.

The best gift you've ever
given to me
is your somewhat
nonjudgmental-by-default,
all-inclusive silence
as you would give to
someone
who is unworthy of your
presence.

I may be ugly as I wear no
attempted disguise
because it seems
I've never been afforded the
luxury to hide.
Much like Miss Bette Davis,
I'll let you know you're a
foolish bastard
with one look from my
green eyes.

Forgiven or unforgiven,
it doesn't necessarily matter
in the context of my specific
presentation.
Said and unsaid
words accompany my
painted spatter
before I leave it to your
interpretation.

Whirling
in a summer's daze,
perhaps I am unfurling
beneath a number gaze.

To you,
I'm too much,
or, perhaps,
I'm never quite enough.
Sufficient insufficiency is
tough,
or, rather,
I'm still ever so rough.

Among other people,
I feel my unattractiveness,
but, high as the steeple,
I also feel my activeness.
So, if you retreat your lips
as if they have been freshly
stung,
then I'll know that my
bittersweet honeysuckle
glance
is not quite your romance
of "handsome."

Adrenaline goes
rushing bright and rouge,
but you're blue,
and I suppose
there's nothing you can do.
You would not know
because it is not expected of
you.

Here you are as a
figure of the past,
but your guest feature
always seems to last.
You're more than an object
And more than any man's
Creature.

Nectar drips much too fast.

A REFLECTION OF PEACE

BRIANNA GARNER

You say it's sweet to die, but would you know?
This is not a life to live any longer-
Together we're here as brothers, with lies of glory whispered into our ears.
How would you know what it's like
To lay down a life, to fight?

The steel of my gun is much closer to my skin than you.
I see your face as a photograph, a memory.
The sun has worn you down like it has me,
But yours is the only face I'll

You say it's sweet to die, but would you know?
This is not a life to live any longer-
Together we're here as brothers, with lies of glory whispered into our ears.
How would you know what it's like
To lay down a life, to fight?

The steel of my gun is much closer to my skin than you.
I see your face as a photograph, a memory.
The sun has worn you down like it has me,
But yours is the only face I'll ever beg to see.

I hear the cries of war that overtake my sleep-
Did you know a man can scream when he only wants to breathe?
He is taken away, choking on his own blood
Left swallowing the cancerous devil of a war misunderstood.

You call me brave as I lay in this dirt,
But you'll never see the blood,
The innocence,
That clings to my shirt.

We fight to stay alive, a battle filled with lies,
There is nothing left of me but the gun the have given me.
You say they are enemies, but I don't know.
What is a life of misery

worth?

I pray to a God I know
doesn't hear me,
For it's too hard to hear above
the screams of my enemies.
They die as I dare to breathe,
Fighting for the hope of
saying, "I am free."

We waste away in trenches
built of treachery,
Waiting for the orders to
return home.
We know the letters will
never come,
Because this dirt is from the
ground of our tombs.

ECSTASY

BRIANNA GARNER

Redness rises to the flesh of my cheeks,
Bitterness becomes a sense I welcome,
Fire courses into my blood-
A place where love once stood.

Coming from unknown veins,
Gasping for life, their words never fade
My ears believe lies drenched in pain.
Lingering behind the scratched rope above-
A silver frame.T

One foot, behind the other-
Clothes falling behind in haste of hands.
Silver strips a sense of clasped innocence.
The look of blood a welcomes friend,
They scream, "Wait!" behind locked
doors.

I rise above the crowd,
Clouds straining against a pale body.
Jewels cascade from a hollow form-
RISING into a distant Storm.

The crowd screams, waiting to breathe
The curtain falls- laying torn.
Light shines onto these darkened sheets,
Where my form stays to bleed.

My lips- they part in ecstasy
Torn from withered lips, I scream
Strained fabric surrounds a nude form;
Gone before the coming of morning

Two syllables left
with the tide,
A scribble, a phrase, a word-
That of,
"Goodbye."

HOMEMADE TASTY AMERICAN RECIPE

ERIN GREEN

One, sift a bag of insecurity
into a medium metal bowl.
Two, walk to your fridge and
grab a bottle of
a cultural appropriation and
pour only a cup inside.

Three, blend with a makeup
brush that
hasn't been cleaned except
for the one time
it was used to correct
eyeshadow for prom night.

Four, you will need to make
sure that you
are listening to the latest
libertarian podcast,
or the dough will not rise.

Five, break and crack three
male tears
into the bowl. This recipe
calls for the brand
known as "Rape Culture."

Six, again, use the makeup
brush to blend.
Mix well, but do not over
mix, or it will
cause political correctness.

Seven, preheat the oven to
approximately 400°,
nothing below that
temperature and nothing
above. If
you set it to anything besides
400, conceit will not heat.

Eight, this recipe calls for
white icing only.
Using other colors for icing
will result in an
inferior cake design. White
is always better.

Nine, take the cake out of
the oven right before
it starts to brown at the
edges. You don't want
it to get too brown, or it will
be shot.

Ten, use a paper bag test to
check the color
of the cake. If the cake is
darker than the paper bag,
toss it in prison, where it
apparently belongs.

Eleven, if the cake is lighter
than the paper bag then
it is cooked well enough to
be eaten.

Let cake cool in privilege.

Twelve, after cooling, using
white icing to frost
the cake. Make sure to apply
enough icing so that
it covers all the color in
the cake. Your goal is total
whiteness.

Thirteen, sprinkle a single
chocolate chip on top of the
cake,
and call it diversity, equality,
or whatever will dismiss the
destruction of something
once beautiful.

MY CHURCH

JESSICA HOLDNAK

You are faith
Lost
You've sinned against me
And I am made unclean
Crawling back, to the ways of my mother

I pray standing on tile
Facing south
Holy water falls on my face in a mask
I allow myself to crumple
Like a used paper bag our cat sat on
Fingers cling tightly to the faucet
My altar

Somehow more connected to my God than the pulpit
Of my Methodist preacher
His football allegories and political parables
Never reached me
Like hot water scalding the nape of my neck

Steam rising from my back
My Holy Ghost
Humid and heavy, choking my lungs

You stained me
Like cigarettes stained the tips of your fingers
I miss your cloud of smoke
The dust you cough up remains stuck in my lungs
No baptism could remove the ink from my hip

Or the soft sting of your kiss on my lip

Like Judas
You traded me for silver
I am no martyr

When you open my ribs with the blade of your spear
You will find me still breathing

A heap
In a soapy puddle on the bathtub floor
Drowning to be reborn

THE DIRT

BEN JACKSON

bury me in a small town where locals breed catfish,
the elders elect to store savings in their mattress,
things always fall apart, and green grass grows in patches

I can't say I'm from the streets
it was the dirt that raised me

the theatrics of backyard banter was
scholastic in ways book-learning wasn't
and I loved sidewalk-less suburbs; still, some
spirit pulls me from the dirt that raised me
and yet city me is unfamiliar

city me latches onto hip-hop classics and tries to
find identity within the syllables of streets I
never walked at night, at night
we'd go play in dark pastures
where starlight would reflect off of our innocence onto
broken beer bottles before fading into ambiance

the dirt that raised me was medicinal
if you rub the minerals in just right

the pot holes stuck out like hungry hands, and
sands from hourglasses seem suspended
in time, we grew from boys to older boys

the dirt that raised me never spared the rod
and was mindful of when streetlights came on
the dirt that raised me expects homecoming

EVE AND ADAM ARE DEAD

SARAH SIZEMORE

A tall tank.
All stars bask
and add altars.
Ah, ask all and ask Adam.
Pay a way.
A hand, a task, a fall
at a pass
as Adam saw.
Adam was all.
Stay always at a day.
A hymnal lands
and a star sways.
A lass lays a task.
Hard days.
Alas, Adam falls.

Eve sheltered the elder.
She feels every peel.
Here the Eden, there the Hell.
Even when the lender lends,
Defend her.
Heel: the sentence.
Lesser need help,
Never bests the senses.
We deserve the end.
Mend.
Men weep regret.
She greets the deed.
He's seen her,
She sees them.
Persevere. The sweet end deepens.
Even Eve, be freed.

PHOBIC

CHELSEA YATES

Spiders bite. Carnivores exist: be it man, animal or thing;

Recliners snap up a misplaced foot as sure
as any meat eating

Mammal would. Why ridicule or doubt? Click on light,
f-f-fl-flicker

He's in closet or down below. Down under. Step lightly

For shadows don't lie. Can't be afraid, in what world? Fear

Rational, scientific equation for fear,
endorphins natural. Adrenaline

Rush, halting one foot at door's edge.
Did that man look this

Way? Is he coming towards me… no.
Not me he was after; stutter

Heart beat in ringing ears. Shutters snapped black, why?

To shield, yielding from dust. Causes contagion
as I scrub clean,

Off the outdoors, dandelion polish. Achoo!
Sanitize germs.

Mind over matter, but do I mind? Pressures of committing,
triggers

Little omissions. Like a gun, bang! Part of the Living Dead;

Can I say the words out loud as they tremble upon lips, waiting for confession?

I-I-I'm s-s-sc-scared. Big world. So much unknown possibilities and I am scared.

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